JEWISH FAIRY STORIES



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JEWISH FAIRY TALES

AN EXCELLENT PRIZE BOOK. **2/6**

JEWISH FAIRY TALES AND FABLES

By AUNT NAOMI

Illustrated by E. STRELLETT *and* J. MARKS

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LONDON: ROBERT SCOTT, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

Jewish Fairy Stories

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BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK

18-8138

PZ 8
.F914
Jef

Preface

THE tales in this book have been gathered together from various Jewish writings. The translation is not literal in any sense of the word. In fact, each story has been recast and presented in a modern setting. Some of the stories are fairy tales. Jewish fairy tales reveal an aspect of the Jewish soul in much the same way as the various national fairy tales embody something of the spirit of the different peoples and nations.

G. F.

September, 1917.

MAR 23 1918
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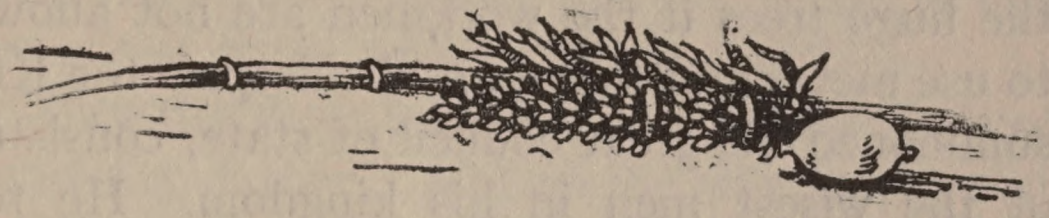
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KING SOLOMON AND THE WORM



BENAIAH SETTING OUT ON HIS JOURNEY.



King Solomon and the Worm

KING SOLOMON, the wisest of men, resolved to build a temple dedicated to the glory of the God of Israel. He remembered the sacred words of Scripture: "And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exod. xx. 25). The tools of iron symbolized the sword, the instrument of war and death; whilst the altar and temple were the symbols of peace and life. Solomon desired that not only the altar, but all the stone-work in the sacred edifice should be made ready for the builders at the quarry without using any metal implement, so that in the course of building the temple no instrument of iron should be employed.

How was this wish to be realized? Even Solomon, the wisest of monarchs, did not know how to set about his task. Again and again he asked himself, How is it possible to split

the immense blocks of stone or to cut down the huge trees if the workmen are not allowed to use metal implements? In despair the King summoned his great council of state, consisting of the wisest men in his kingdom. He told them his difficulty and asked them if they could help him to achieve his purpose. The counsellors listened to the words of their beloved monarch in profound silence. After a while one of the most venerable of those present arose and, turning to the King, spake as follows:—

"Long live the King! Mighty Sovereign! Hast thou not heard that among the countless creatures of the Most High there is one which can serve thee as thy heart desires? It can cut stone better than the sharpest tool of iron. I refer to the tiny but wonderful worm called the Shamir, or diamond insect. Dost thou not know, O wisest of rulers, how the Almighty created ten marvels in the twilight of the eve of the first Sabbath in the week of creation? Among these marvels was the worm Shamir. Its size is that of a grain of barley. It is endowed with miraculous power, for, behold! it can split the hardest stone by merely touching it. Moreover, iron is broken by its mere presence."

"Excellent wisdom is this which thou shewest

forth, beloved counsellor," cried Solomon with joy in his heart. "Now tell me, where is this marvellous little worm to be found?"

"May thy days be as glorious as the days of David thy father," replied the wise servant of the King, "but more than I have already told thee I know not. No mortal being has ever discovered the home of the Shamir. It is useless to seek the information thou desirest by consulting the sons of men; has not God bestowed upon thee, knowledge and understanding more than He has given to any one else? Is it for nought that thy wisdom exceeds that of all the children of men? Art thou not ruler of all the spirits and demons? Seek their aid, Sire! and thou wilt find the Shamir. Invoke the wisest of the spirits who will reveal to thee even the secrets of the heavens above, of the earth beneath, and of the waters under the earth."

The good advice of the counsellor appealed with irresistible conviction to Solomon's heart, and after thanking his wise minister, dismissed his council in order to carry out the suggested plan. He looked at the ring on his right hand and read the Holy Name of God engraved thereon. No sooner had he pronounced the Divine Name than a demon appeared before him and, making obeisance, cried,—

"What is thy wish, Solomon, King of Israel?"

"I command thee," said Solomon, "to tell me where is the worm Shamir to be found?"

In a trembling voice the demon replied,—

"Mighty King of man and spirits! I am thy servant, I will always obey thee if I have the power so to do. Be not angry with me, for I fear I cannot help thee now. The secret thou desirest to know has not been revealed to any of the inferior demons. It is only Ashmodai our King who is in possession of the secret."

"Tell me," interrupted King Solomon, "where does Ashmodai, the King of the demons dwell?"

"May it please your gracious Majesty," the demon responded, "Ashmodai lives far, far away from the haunts of men. His palace is built on the top of a very high mountain. In this same mountain he has had a very deep well dug. Daily he fetches his drinking water from this well. When he has obtained sufficient water for his immediate needs, he closes up the mouth of the well with an enormous rock which he seals with his signet-ring. He then flies up to heaven to receive the orders of those who are his superiors. His tasks take him to the ends of the earth, even beyond the great sea. With the going down of the sun in the west,

he returns to his own home. He examines very carefully the seal on the rock at the mouth of the well, in order to find out if it has been tampered with in his absence. He then proceeds to uncover the well and he partakes of the water. Having quenched his thirst he covers up again the mouth of the well and seals it afresh."

King Solomon sat on his wonderful throne of gold whilst the demon told his tale. Not a word escaped the memory of the wise King. He then dismissed the demon, who disappeared in less than a second. Thereupon Solomon summoned to his presence his brave captain and friend Benaiah, son of Jehoiada. He told him briefly the nature of the task he was chosen to undertake, saying,—

"Go, trusty servant Benaiah, and capture Ashmodai, the King of the demons, and bring him before my presence. To assist thee in thy arduous and perilous undertaking I will give thee this golden chain on the links of which the letters forming the Divine Name are engraved. I also will entrust to thy care my signet-ring which is also engraved with the Holy Name of the Most High. Take with thee also this large bundle of white wool and these skins full of strong wine."

After giving him minute instructions about

the journey and the way to overcome Ashmodai, he sent Benaiah on his way, wishing him complete success in all his undertaking.

The brave warrior, confident of success, set out on his dangerous expedition. After many days of hard riding across the great desert he ultimately reached his destination. Never had he seen such a desolate spot. In front of him stood the towering mountain without sign of any human habitation in the vicinity. The mountain seemed to be the abode of silence and death. Undaunted by the uncanny scene, Benaiah began the ascent of the rugged mountain with a stout heart. He feared neither man nor spirit, for he was wearing on his little finger King Solomon's signet-ring. When halfway up the mountain he bored a hole in order to discover the whereabouts of Ashmodai's well. Great was his delight when he discovered the position of the well. He drew off the water and stopped up the hole with the wool which he had brought with him. Quite near to this hole, Benaiah pierced an aperture which ran into the well. Through this channel he poured all the wine in the skins. After this labour was completed he concealed himself behind a large crag and waited impatiently for the arrival of the King of the demons.

Soon after sunset Ashmodai drew nigh. He

carefully examined the seal on the rock over the mouth of the well and found it intact, even as he had left it early in the morning. After he had rolled away the rock, he descended into the well to quench his thirst. The strange odour of the fragrant wine overpowered him so that he quickly returned to the mouth of the well to inhale the fresh mountain air. Realizing that the well had been tampered with, he again examined the seal, but it did not appear to have been touched. Meanwhile a burning thirst in his throat forced him to descend again in order to obtain something to drink. No sooner had he tasted the wine than he desired to drink more and more. After he had partaken very freely of the strong wine, he felt quite drowsy. All his senses were overpowered. His head became heavy, his body staggered and his knees gave way. At last he fell to the ground and slept soundly.

Benaiah now came forth from his hiding-place and crept very quietly to the sleeping demon. Without wasting a moment, the good captain threw the golden chain around Ashmodai's neck and secured it and sealed it with the golden signet-ring engraved with the Divine Name. Benaiah sat on the ground close by waiting for the effects of the strong wine to wear off. After a while Ashmodai awoke and

found that he was no longer free, for he saw the golden chain around his neck and he beheld the Holy Name on the seal. He uttered such a terrible groan that the mountain shook. In vain Ashmodai endeavoured to rise up. In his anger sparks of fire flew from his eyes and foam covered his mouth.

He continued to wriggle and to struggle with the air, but all to no purpose. He could not arise. He looked at Benaiah and cried in bitter anger,—

"Is it thou who hast bewitched me?"

"Verily," replied Benaiah, "behold the Name of the Lord of lords is upon thee."

Ashmodai immediately became quiet and calm. He knew that he was vanquished and realized that all further resistance would be futile. He told Benaiah that he was quite ready to obey his orders.

"Come then," cried Benaiah, "we will go at once to King Solomon, thy master. Arise and follow me."

Ashmodai arose and followed Benaiah, who was surprised at the peculiar behaviour of his captive on their way to the Holy City. Wherever they passed, Ashmodai left behind him a trace of his might or intelligence. In one village he brushed against a palm tree. After its foliage had been shaken off by the terrific im-

pact, he uprooted it with one hand. In another place he knocked his shoulder against a house and overturned it. In a market-place in a large town they met a happy bridal procession. When the bride and bridegroom passed, Ashmodai began to weep.

"Why dost thou weep?" Benaiah asked in surprise.

"Alas!" replied Ashmodai, "within three days the bridegroom will be a corpse. Do I not do well to weep?"

In the next town on their journey they overheard a farmer asking a bootmaker to make a pair of shoes which were to last him for seven years. Whereupon Ashmodai burst out laughing.

"Tell me, Ashmodai," cried Benaiah, "why dost thou laugh?"

"Because the poor fellow will not wear his shoes for even seven days; behold within a week he will die—yet he asks for shoes to last him seven years."

One day they met a blind man going astray. Ashmodai hastened to set him on the right path. He showed a similar kindness to a drunkard whom they met at the cross-roads. On another occasion they saw a magician who was exhibiting his skill in public. He claimed to be able to read the future and to disclose secrets. Here again Ashmodai found occasion

for mirth and laughter. When Benaiah asked him to explain his strange conduct, he remarked,—

"Wouldst thou not laugh also at a man who pretends to reveal secrets, whilst at the same moment he is unaware of the fact that a treasure lies buried at his feet? We demons judge persons and things according to their true value and not according to their deceptive appearance in the eyes of man."

After many strange adventures they finally came to the Holy City. Benaiah conducted his captive to the royal presence. As soon as Ashmodai beheld King Solomon, fear seized him and he began to tremble violently in every limb. He held a long staff in his hand on which he supported himself. After his attack of nervousness had subsided, Ashmodai threw his staff before the King.

"What art thou doing?" asked Solomon.

"Mighty Sovereign, gracious master," replied Ashmodai, "dost thou not know that in spite of all thy splendour and glory thou wilt occupy after thy death no more space in the earth than is measured by yonder staff, yet thou art not satisfied with ruling the children of men, but thou must needs hold the spirits and demons in subjection."

"Be not vexed," Solomon said in a gentle

tone of voice; "thou wilt not find me a hard master. I merely demand one little service at thy hands. Know then that I wish to build a great Temple to the glory of the Creator of heaven and earth, and for this purpose I require the services of the wonderful worm Shamir. Tell me now, where can I find this tiny creature?"

"O wisest of mortals," replied Ashmodai, "dost thou not really know that the Shamir has not been placed in my charge? Why then hast thou brought me here?"

"Where is it?" thundered Solomon; "speak, slave! and speak truly."

Ashmodai with a trembling voice replied,—

"Mighty master! Since the days of Moses, who employed the Shamir when writing on the tablets of stone, the worm has been entrusted to the care of the Prince of the Sea who has given it into the charge of the wood-cock. The latter has sworn to the Prince of the Sea to carry the Shamir with him at all times. The wood-cock lives in a big nest built on the top of a very lofty pinnacle in a mountain range. He has employed the Shamir to split the hard rock so as to plant seed in the clefts. The new vegetation which grows there is used for food by the wood-cock. Whenever he goes from his nest he takes the Shamir with him, carrying

it beneath his wing, mindful of his oath to the Prince of the Sea."

"Enough," cried Solomon; "thou shalt abide with me till the Temple is built."

Once again King Solomon summoned his trusty captain Benaiah, telling him to discover the nest of the wood-cock and to obtain the Shamir and to bring it back to the Holy City.

"Take with thee," said the King, "a glass cover, a little wool and a small leaden box. May thy journey be as successful this time as thy former one."

Benaiah obeyed with a glad heart all the instructions which King Solomon had given. He set out on his journey, crossing hill and dale, stream and desert. At last he discovered the nest of the bird he sought. The wood-cock was away on one of his expeditions. In the nest were the fledgelings. Benaiah now covered the nest with the glass cover which he had brought with him for this purpose. He then concealed himself and awaited events.

When the wood-cock returned he attempted to enter his nest, but found himself foiled, for the glass was very hard and strong. He saw through the glass his helpless young; and flapping his wings and screeching loudly tried

to break the glass. All his efforts were in vain. The young birds frightened by the noise also began to screech.

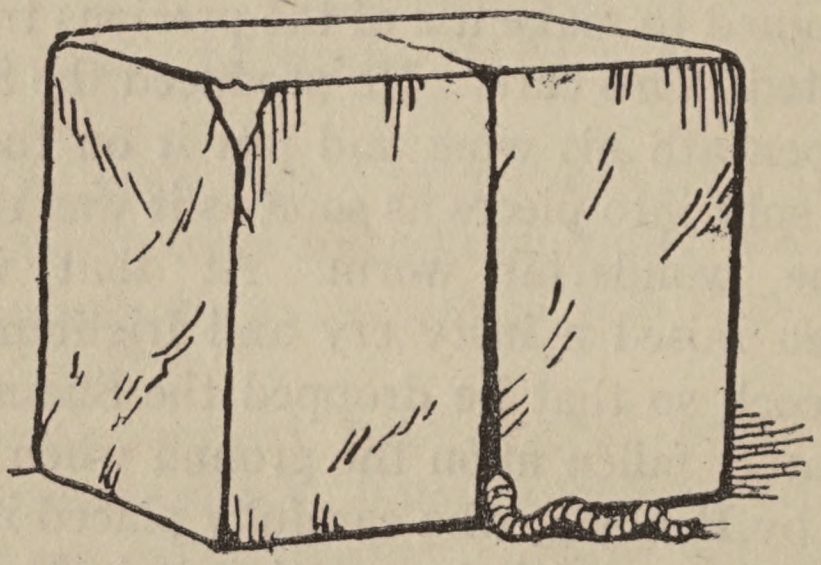
"What is to be done?" cried the wood-cock in the language of the birds.

Again and again he tried to smash the glass, but without success. As a last resource, he determined to make use of the precious treasure entrusted to his care. He produced the Shamir from beneath his wing and put it on the glass which split into pieces as soon as it was touched by the wonderful worm. At that instant Benaiah raised a lusty cry and frightened the wood-cock so that he dropped the Shamir. It had barely fallen upon the ground when it was seized by Benaiah, who carefully placed it in the wool and secured it by putting it in the small leaden box which he had brought for this special purpose.

Without lingering a moment, Benaiah set out on his homeward journey, rejoicing greatly at his complete success. In chagrin the wood-cock killed himself, fearing the terrible vengeance which the Prince of the Sea would execute when the disappearance of the Shamir became known. Benaiah reached the Holy City in safety and delivered to King Solomon the wonderful worm. With its marvellous help the wise King built the Temple, and thereafter

the Shamir has disappeared and no one knows where it is to be found.

(BABYLONIAN TALMUD GIṬṬIN, 68 a and b.)



FALSEHOOD AND WICKEDNESS





Falsehood and Wickedness

AFTER good old father Noah had completed the building of the ark, the animals were gathered together near it by the angels appointed over them. They came in pairs, and Noah stood at the door of the ark to see that each one entered with its mate. As soon as the waters of the flood rose upon the surface of the earth, the children of men hid themselves in their homes for safety. All traffic and business ceased, for the angel of death was abroad. This state of affairs caused Falsehood to realize that henceforth there was no chance of her plying her trade. Was it not quite evident that the ever-increasing waters of the flood would soon sweep away the wicked folk

who had rebelled against their Heavenly Creator? Where should Falsehood betake herself for safety?

Forthwith she hastened to the ark, but its door was shut. What was to be done?

Falsehood knocked at the door with trembling hand. Noah opened the window of the ark, and put out his head to see who was knocking. It was a strange creature before his door. Noah had never seen her before, because he was a righteous man who never told lies.

"What dost thou want?" he cried.

"Let me come in, please," she replied.

"Gladly," cried Noah, "would I admit thee if thy mate were with thee, for only pairs are admitted here."

In grief and disappointment Falsehood went away. She had not gone a few yards before she met her old friend Wickedness, who was now out of employment.

"Whence cometh thou, dear friend Falsehood?" asked Wickedness.

"I come," said Falsehood, "from old father Noah. Just listen. I asked him to let me come into the ark, but he refused unless I complied with his rules."

"What does he require?" asked Wickedness.

"The good old man stipulated that I must have a mate, because all the creatures admitted

into the ark are in pairs," Falsehood replied.

"Now, dear friend, is this the truth?" queried Wickedness with a merry twinkle in his evil eye.

"Of course it is the truth, on my word of honour," rejoined Falsehood. "Come now," she added, "wilt thou be my mate? Are we not just fit to be joined together, two honest and poor creatures?"

"If I agree," said Wickedness, "what wilt thou give me in return?"

Falsehood thought awhile and with a cunning look at her friend she exclaimed,—

"I faithfully promise to give to thee all that I earn in the ark. Have no fear, I shall do excellent business even there, because I feel very fit and energetic."

Wickedness agreed to the terms immediately, and there and then a proper agreement was drawn up, and duly signed and sealed. Without further delay they both hastened to Noah, who readily admitted the happy pair.

Falsehood soon began to be very busy and earned good money. She often thought of her agreement with Wickedness with regret, as she realized that she alone did all the business. She even said to him one day,—

"Look here, how easily can I carry on my trade single-handed?"

He merely reminded her of the agreement,

and day by day he wrote down in his ledger the sum total of the day's takings.

At the end of the year, for the flood lasted twelve months, they came out of the ark. Falsehood brought home much treasure, but Wickedness came with her and claimed the whole of the hard-earned fortune. Thereupon Falsehood said to herself, "I will ask my mate to give me some of my earnings."

She approached Wickedness and in a gentle voice said,—

"Dearest friend, please give me a share of what I have so honestly earned, for I alone did all the work."

Wickedness looked at her in contempt and with harsh voice cried aloud,—

"Thy share is nought, O cheat! Did we not solemnly agree that I was to take everything which thou shouldst earn? How could I break our agreement? Would this not be a very wicked thing to do, now would it not?"

Falsehood held her peace and went away, well knowing that she had been foiled in her attempt to cheat her friend Wickedness. True indeed is the proverb: "Falsehood begets much, but Wickedness taketh all that away."

(YALḲUṬ, *Psalms* § 638.)

THE WICKED KING AND HIS BRIDE



THE QUEEN SPRINKLING THE WATER OF LIFE ON CHANINAH.



The Wicked King and his Bride

LONG, long ago there lived in the Holy Land an old peasant and his wife. They had an only son who was also married. The family all lived happily together in a little house in a village near Samaria. The son, whose name was Chaninah, was a very good man, deeply learned in the Holy Scriptures and the ancient lore of Israel.

In course of time the old father, feeling his end drawing near, called his beloved son to his bedside and said to him,—

" Hearken, my son, to the words which I am

about to speak. Your mother and I will soon die. After our death and burial you will observe the customary period of mourning and lamentation. On the day following go to the nearest market-place and buy the first thing offered to you, be the price what it may. I also charge you to continue the study of the Holy Word of the Bible by day and by night, keep the Divine Commandments, support the poor and be kind to the dumb creatures."

After he had spoken these words he blessed his son and closed his eyes in the sleep of death.

Chaninah went to tell his mother of the death of his father. The sad news was too much for the poor woman and the shock killed her instantly. The pious son buried his beloved parents in the village cemetery and returned home to keep the customary period of mourning and lamentation, which lasted seven days.

Mindful of his father's dying words, Chaninah went on the following morning to the nearest market-place. One of the merchants, carrying a beautiful silver casket in his hands, came to him and said,—

"Will you buy this casket?"

"What is the price?" asked Chaninah.

"I will take eighty pieces of silver for it," answered the merchant, and he added, "I will not accept any less."

Chaninah agreed, and there and then paid the large sum of money demanded, thinking all the while of his dear father's last wish. The money which he had spent in buying the casket was nearly all the fortune he possessed.

Without any further delay he returned home with his purchase, which he was anxious to show to his wife.

"Look here," he cried, "I have spent nearly all our money in buying this casket, even as dear father told me to do just before he died."

"Open it," said his wife; "there is sure to be something very valuable inside it."

He lifted the lid of the casket and was astonished to find that it contained another silver box. He took this out and opened it, curious to learn what was inside. To their great surprise a little green frog leapt out.

"Well, I never," cried Chaninah, "this is an expensive creature."

"Do not forget," his wife said, "your father's command to be kind to the dumb creatures."

"Quite right," says her husband, "we will provide for the frog even as though the little fellow were one of us."

The frog grew larger and larger and the silver box was no longer large enough for its quarters. Chaninah therefore made a nice roomy cupboard for their new friend's abode. After a

while the wife told her husband that there was no more money left to buy food. With a very sad heart the good man called the frog to his side and said,—

"I am awfully sorry to tell you, dear little friend, that we cannot feed you any longer because we have no food left even for ourselves."

"Please don't worry," cried the frog, "I hope you will believe me when I tell you that I am indeed more than grateful to you both, for all your kindness and hospitality. Let me prove my gratitude by giving you this piece of advice. In the box where you found me, you will see a strip of parchment. If you place it in the fold of your turban you will be able to understand not only the different languages of mankind but also the speech of birds, fish and beasts."

Chaninah did exactly as the frog told him, and calling his wife told her that they would accompany the frog to his new home wherever it might be. The frog said this should be in a pond in the wood near by.

They all went to the wood feeling sad that poverty was forcing them to part company.

As soon as they came to the wood the frog told them to rest themselves. Then at the bidding of the frog, the birds and beasts in the wood brought to Chaninah and his wife an im-

mense quantity of valuable gems and an assortment of roots and herbs. The kind-hearted frog gave these gifts to his good friends, explaining how the herbs and roots were to be used for healing purposes. Then at last the frog bids his friends farewell and tells them that he was really a son of Adam and the demon Lilith, and that he had the power of changing himself into any shape.

Chaninah and his wife gathered up the precious gems, roots and herbs and returned home. On the way they met a caravan and offered some of the gems for sale. A good bargain was struck and Chaninah and his wife found themselves with plenty of money. They left their old home and bought a nice house. Riches did not spoil them, for their hearts were kind. Moreover Chaninah kept faithfully the charge of his beloved father. He studied the holy words of Scripture by day and by night and observed the Divine precepts with a good will. Their home was always open to the poor. The good fortune of Chaninah spread far and wide. His reputation as a charitable man reached the ears of the King who invited him to visit his Court.

The King took a great fancy to Chaninah and persuaded him to take up his abode in the palace. The King was by no means a pious

man, in fact he was very wicked and cruel. He was unmarried, and this fact alone displeased his subjects. His counsellors urged him to find a good wife, saying to him,—

"Let us, O King, remind you that we require not only a king but also a queen and little princes; for there will surely come a time when a new king will have to be found—because kings and queens are mortals and they cannot live for ever."

They did not tell the King what their real motive was in advising him to marry. They thought that if the King were to find a true and good wife it might be possible for her to use her influence and make him a better man.

The King dismissed his counsellors, promising to see them again in a week's time, when he would tell them whether he would marry or not. When they came to the palace at the appointed time the King's valet met them and told them that His Majesty would receive them in the palace garden.

They went there and found the King sitting on his throne. As they approached he rose up and bade them welcome. At that moment a beautiful bird flew over the King and dropped a long golden hair upon his shoulder. The King took the hair in his hand and turning to his counsellors said,—

"I will marry only the maiden to whom this golden hair belongs. No other wife shall be mine. You wish me to marry—well and good—so be it. I now command you to discover the owner of this golden hair, and mark you, if you do not bring her to me within a year from to-day I will have you and all your families put to death."

The counsellors were greatly distressed at the turn of events. They feared that their lives would be forfeit. How were they to find the lady whose golden hair had brought misfortune to them and their families? With sad hearts they left the royal presence, and when they were outside the palace they asked one another, "What is to be done?"

Chaninah, who was now one of the King's counsellors, offered to find the lady destined to be their queen. He hastened home to bid his wife farewell and to prepare for his journey. He took a bag into which he put six loaves, a small assortment of his precious herbs and roots and twelve silver coins. Having blessed his wife he set out on his quest.

He walked during the best part of the day and at sunset, feeling very tired, he sat down on a large stone beneath a tree. He was just about to doze off when he was suddenly startled by hearing a raven's croak. He listened and

understood that the bird had not found any food for three days. He at once opened his bag and gave the raven a large piece of bread. On the morrow Chaninah met a dog howling miserably.

"Come and tell me," he said to the dog, "all your troubles. I understand the speech of beasts and birds."

The dog said that he was very ill and hungry, for it was just a week since he had eaten any food. Chaninah gave him one of the healing roots and a loaf of bread. The dog devoured the bread and ate the root and thanked his good friend.

Next day Chaninah came to a river and found some fishermen trying in vain to pull in their net, which contained a large fish. The fishermen pulled so hard that they feared their net would break. Chaninah lent them a willing hand and then they were able to pull in the net. The fishermen shouted with joy,—

"We have enough now for dinner to-day and to-morrow."

Chaninah asked them to sell the fish and he would give them twelve pieces of silver as its price. They agreed and gave him the fish as soon as he had paid them. They could hardly believe their eyes when they saw Chaninah throwing the fish back into the river.

Bidding them farewell he continued his journey.

At last he came to a large town where, unknown to him, dwelt the maiden whom he was seeking. She was a princess, the only daughter of the King of that country.

Chaninah came to the courtyard of the palace and stood still awhile gazing around. The Princess was looking out of the window of her room, and saw Chaninah, whose strange attire attracted her attention. She sends her chamberlain to bring him to her presence.

In reply to her inquiry as to the why and wherefore of his visit to her father's land, Chaninah tells her the story of his quest. Looking at her he sees that she is the very lady whom he has to find to be the wife of the King, his master, for her tresses were golden even like the hue of the hair which the King found upon his shoulder.

"Come, good lady, with me," he cries, "and save my people, the wise men of Israel and their families, who are in mortal danger. Come and be Queen in our land and save the soul of our lord the King."

The Princess had listened very attentively to all the strange story told by Chaninah, and in reply she said,—

"Well do I remember drying my hair one day

last month in the garden of our palace, and whilst doing so a strange bird flew over my head three times and then plucked out one of my hairs. He flew away with the hair and I can now believe that this is the very bird which brought my hair to the King of your land. I will accede to your wish and consent to become the Queen of your land if you fulfil two tasks which I will set you. The first I will mention at once. Here I have two empty flasks. You must bring them back to me full of water. I do not mean the water of the brook or well, but the one flask must contain water from Paradise and the other must be filled with water from Hell. When you have done this task I will tell you all about the second one."

With a kind word of farewell the Princess dismissed Chaninah. He left the palace with a sad heart and prayed to God to help him in his difficulty. Was he not trying to save the lives of his brethren in the Holy Land?

After a little while he hears the croak of a raven speaking as follows:—

"Dear friend! do you no longer remember me? Did you not give me bread when you met me? I was so hungry then, for I had not tasted any food for three days. Now just tell me, How can I be of service? I will gladly do my best to please you."

Chaninah told the raven all about the task which the Princess had set him to do.

" Here are the flasks," he said ; " one must be filled with water from Paradise and the other must be filled with water from Hell."

The raven told him to tie a flask to each wing and at sunset to be at the spot where they were conversing. The raven flew to the nether-world and singed his wings in passing through the flames of Hell. At last he reached the black boiling waters in the centre of Hell and filled one flask. He then flew to the gates of Paradise and found the spring which flows from its midst and bathed in its cool water to heal his wings. He then filled the other flask and flew to the spot where he had arranged to meet his friend. He gave the flasks filled with the desired water to Chaninah, who returned to the palace and told the Princess that the task was done.

The Princess was in doubt whether the water of each flask was genuine. She proposed to test the contents there and then. Opening the flask containing the water from Hell, she poured a few drops upon the palm of her hand. The water burnt her skin and she quickly put some of the water of the other flask upon the burnt spot and healed it at once. She told Chaninah that she was quite satisfied with this perform-ance.

" But now," she said, " you have to perform a much more difficult task. Just listen. Some years ago I was playing with my ring in a boat and by accident I dropped it into the water. It was a golden ring with my initials engraved on the gold and set with a beautiful pearl. Restore this ring, and when I have it again I will comply with your request."

The Princess thought that it would be impossible to find her ring and that she would not be bothered to accede to the wish of Chaninah. She again dismissed him with a few kind words and told him not to be disappointed if he failed to find the ring.

Chaninah at once turned his thoughts to God and prayed for Divine help. He then went to the nearest river, hoping that his good fortune would not forsake him. As soon as he came to the water he beheld the large fish which he had purchased and thrown back into the river.

" Tell me," said the fish, " what you desire, and I will try to help you."

Chaninah told the fish the story of the ring of the Princess, and said that he must have this ring as soon as possible.

" Meet me at yonder bridge," said the fish, " to-morrow morning at daybreak and I will bring you news concerning the ring."

The fish then swam away and made for the

bottom of the great sea in order to seek the help of Leviathan, the monster king of the deep.

Leviathan welcomed the fish, and having heard his story promised to help him. He issued an order throughout his vast kingdom compelling every fish to report to him if any such ring had been heard of or discovered. If he should discover that a fish had the ring and failed to produce it, very severe penalties were sure to follow. Within an hour the ring was brought to the palace of Leviathan and placed before his throne. Leviathan then gave it to the fish which had promised to help Chaninah.

Next morning at daybreak the fish delivered the ring to Chaninah, who rejoiced greatly at the cleverness of the fish. How glad he was that he had fulfilled his dear father's wishes in being kind to birds, beasts and fish.

At noon Chaninah entered the palace and was brought at once to the Princess.

"Behold," he cried in a joyful voice, "your Royal Highness! is this not your ring? Your initials are engraved on the gold."

The Princess admitted that this was her ring, and as the two tasks, which she had imposed, had been satisfactorily accomplished, she now consented to accompany Chaninah to the Holy Land.

On the way they were attacked by robbers.

Chaninah, fearing that he would be overpowered, called for help. At that moment a dog ran up to his side and barked so furiously that the robbers made off. The dog was glad to repay Chaninah for having fed him and healed him in days gone by.

At last they came to the Holy Land, and when the King saw the beautiful princess with the golden hair he was very happy. Amidst general rejoicing the royal wedding took place. The King rewarded Chaninah by making him his chief counsellor of State. The good man's success, however, was marred by a great misfortune which had befallen him during his absence. His good wife had died. Moreover, some of the royal servants were envious of his advancement in the King's favour. They resolved to hire some ruffians who were to waylay him. One day as he was leaving the palace the ruffians attacked him and killed him in the courtyard. As soon as the news of the sad event was told to the Queen, she cried,—

"Never mind! let me see what can be done."

She went to her cabinet and took out the flask containing the water from Paradise. She then went to the courtyard where the King and nobles were gathered around the corpse.

"Make way for Her Majesty the Queen!" the people cried.

When the Queen saw the dead body of her friend she smiled. All eyes were fixed on her. She sprinkled some of the precious water upon the corpse and immediately Chaninah opened his eyes and arose. Now the people understood why the Queen had smiled.

"Come now," said the King to his wife, "kill me and restore me to life again. I should just like to know how it feels to be dead."

The Queen declined to murder her husband, and turning to him she cried,—

"Do not be so wicked. Life is sacred. Moreover, the wonderful water will only bring a person back to life provided his life had been good."

"Your Majesty," she added, "must repent and mend your ways, otherwise you will not be restored to life in the hereafter."

The King went away in anger and returned to his royal apartments. Here he ordered one of his servants to kill him.

"If you refuse," cried the wicked King, "I will instantly kill you."

Whereupon the servant obeyed the King and slew him.

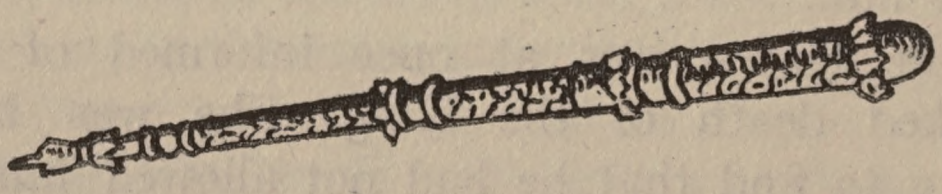
The Queen was at once informed of the wicked death of the King. She was truly sorry to find that he had not allowed himself to be influenced by her advice, but that he had

trifled with his life. She therefore fetched the flask containing water from Hell. Then she sprinkled its contents upon the body of the wicked King. His body immediately was burnt to ashes. She thereupon turned to the astonished members of the Court who were looking on, and in a gentle voice she said,—

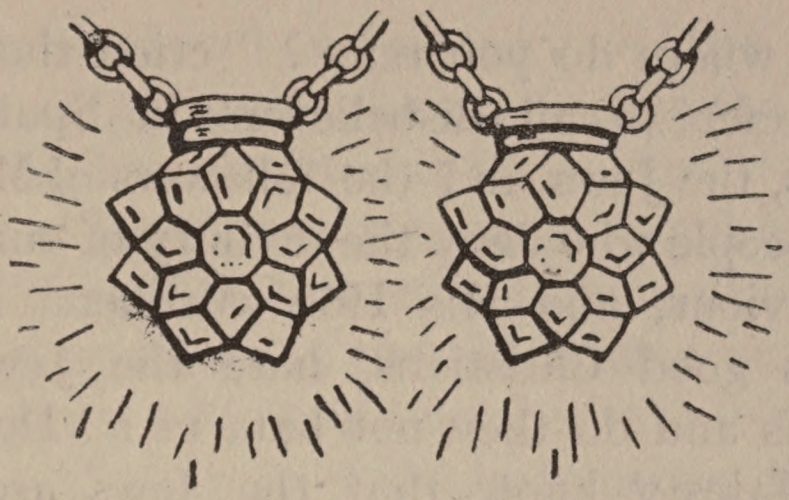
"Do you not see, good friends, that if my husband had been a good and holy man he would have been restored to life, just like Chaninah. But the fact is that he was a cruel and bad man. You all knew this even before I came here from my father's land."

After the burial of the King, the counsellors came to the Queen and urged her to marry Chaninah, who had proved such a trusty friend. The suggestion pleased the Queen, who gladly gave her heart and hand to the good man. They ruled the people in justice and kindness, and as long as they reigned there was peace in the land.

(*From the* JEWISH CHAP BOOK,
Ma'aseh Book, § 143.)



THE TWO JEWELS



The Two Jewels

IN the early period of the Middle Ages there was a King of Spain, Pedro by name. He was a wise and tolerant ruler. In his kingdom Christians, Jews and Mohammedans were to be found. It was a time when brotherly love was to be discovered in the Holy Scriptures only.

King Pedro was one day about to set out at the head of his army to attack his enemies in a neighbouring land. Nicholas of Valencia, one of the royal counsellors, came to Pedro and exclaimed,—

"O most gracious sire! May I ask your Majesty a question?"

"Ask, good friend Nicholas," said the King.

"What need is there for your Majesty to leave your kingdom to fight your enemies beyond the border, when you have so many dangerous enemies within your kingdom?"

"To whom do you refer?" cried the King.

"I refer to all disbelievers in Spain, the heretics, the Jews and the followers of Mahommet—people who deny the divinity of our Lord, our Saviour, and His Holy Mother. Do we not, as good Christians, hate the Jews and Moslems and do they not hate us? Does not your Majesty know that the Jews are commanded in their holy Bible to abstain from greeting the Christians?"

"How can that be true," said the wise King, "since the Hebrew Bible was written at a time when there were no Christians?"

"Nevertheless," continued Nicholas, "I have heard it said, that even though a Jew would greet a Christian saying to him, 'Peace be unto you,' he immediately adds under his breath, 'but may the Devil take you.'"

"How do you know this?" exclaimed the King in astonishment.

"I was told this," replied Nicholas, "by a most saintly man, one Geronimo, a converted Jew."

"No, no," interrupted Pedro, "I would not believe such a man. Any one who changes his religion will not scruple to change his word, twisting the truth into falsehood. Do you not also realize that the testimony of such a convert is probably unreliable, because he is now

anxious to show how intensely he loves his new faith, and this he does best by hating the religion which he has abandoned ?"

" Your Majesty may be right," said Nicholas, " but," he added, " there is nothing which vexes my soul so much as the unbounded impudence of the Jews, who would not hesitate to tell your Majesty that their Religion is better than our Holy Faith."

" Do not let this vex you, good Nicholas," said Pedro; " prove your statement by bringing a Jew before me and let me hear from his own lips this glorification of his religion, and then I will tell you whether I feel vexed or not."

Nicholas left the King in order to fetch a Jew as commanded by his royal master. After a few minutes had elapsed, he returned, bringing with him a venerable man with a long beard, white as the driven snow.

" Welcome ! " exclaimed King Pedro; " be seated, noble Jew, and answer me without fear or favour any questions I may put to you."

" May it please your Majesty," said the Jew, who had risen from his seat when about to speak, " life is dear to me and mine, but truth and honour are dearer still. For nearly ninety years have I remained steadfast to the faith of my fathers. I most humbly beg your Majesty to suffer me and my people to continue to be

loyal not only to God, our Heavenly King, but also to your Majesty."

"Have no fear, good Jew, but now tell me your name," says King Pedro.

"I am called," he replies, "Ephraim, the son of Sancho."

"Now will you tell me," asks the King, "which religion, Judaism or Christianity, is more true and real?"

After a moment's thought Ephraim replies,—

"My religion is the only good one for me in view of my circumstances. Your Majesty knows that my ancestors, the children of Israel, were once slaves in the land of Egypt. God in His great mercy redeemed my people from that land of bondage with signs and wonders. My religion is bound up with this wonderful love of God, who not only redeemed us, but He also gave us our laws and commandments. In keeping these laws and commandments we serve God, and this is our religion, and it is the most natural for the people of Israel. For your Majesty, however, who is born to rule nations and creeds, your religion is the most suitable, because Christianity is the predominant faith which has cramped my religion in Ghettos and darkness. Christianity has even resolved in this land to drive out the Mohammedans, so

that a believer in the Koran shall not be found in Catholic Spain."

"You have spoken wisely and daringly," says the King, "but I did not ask you to discuss the various religions from the point of view of the individual believer, but I wished to know which religion, in your opinion, is the best. You can limit your reply by discussing whether Judaism is better than Christianity, or, as we think, vice versa."

Ephraim replied,—

"In three days' time, if it please your Majesty, I will return and give you my humble opinion. I cannot promise to satisfy your Majesty, but I will do my best to justify my conscience."

The King consented to this proposal, and dismissed the Jew with a friendly farewell.

Three days later the King and Nicholas were anxiously awaiting the promised reply. At the hour appointed, Ephraim appeared. He was very much agitated and gasped for breath.

"Most heartily welcome," cries Pedro in his most friendly voice; "come and sit near my throne and tell me your answer to my question."

Ephraim sat in silence and failed to control his agitation.

"What is the matter, good Ephraim?" asked the King, who was now beginning to feel con-

cerned at the Jew's prolonged silence and unusual excitement.

At last by a great effort Ephraim exclaimed,—

"I grieve to tell your Majesty that I am ill. I have this day been most grossly insulted and abused. I am perfectly innocent of having done any wrong to the men who have been so cruel and unjust to me. Gracious King! I appeal to you to hear my complaint and to see that justice is done."

"Have no fear," cried the King. "I am the fountain of justice, and every one in my realm may look to me for impartial judgment. What is your complaint?"

The King and Nicholas turned to Ephraim and anxiously awaited his reply.

"My story is as follows," says the Jew. "A month ago my neighbour went away from home on a very long journey. In order to give some comfort and consolation to his two sons during his absence, he gave a precious jewel to each of them. Early this day the two sons of my good neighbour came to my house and asked to see me. I received them very politely in my humble apartment and asked them how I could be of service. They showed me their jewels and demanded that I should there and then explain to them both the various characteristics of the gems. I was also to point out the beauties

and flaws—if any—in the precious stones. They asked me to appraise their value and to decide which of the two was the better and the more valuable. I told them that there was no one so well qualified to answer all their questions as their dear father who happens to be an eminent authority on gems, for he is a jeweller. 'Go,' I said, 'to your beloved father and let him decide, for he will tell you all you desire to know about the jewels, and whatever he tells you will be right and true.' No sooner had I said this, when the two sons attacked me, striking me upon my head. They abused me, calling me 'heretic and Jew,' just because I tried to answer their question to the best of my ability."

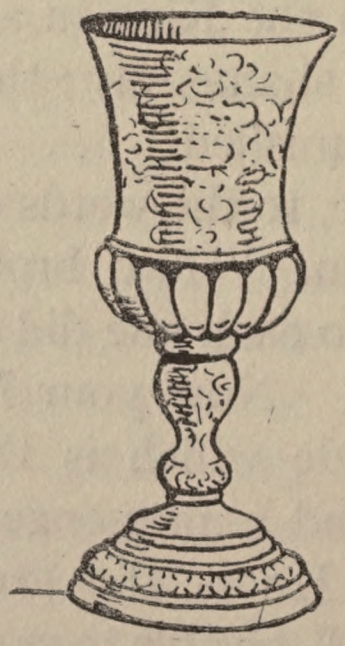
"Truly," cried the King in a passion, "they have acted most shamefully; they deserve to be most severely punished."

"Listen, O sire, to the words of your mouth," rejoined Ephraim. "Two brothers were Esau and Jacob, and to each one did their father give a precious jewel. Now your Majesty likewise asks me to decide which is the better? Let your Majesty send a messenger to our Father in Heaven, for He is the greatest owner of jewels, and He will be able to explain exactly how the two jewels differ, and He will also tell your Majesty which of the two is the more precious."

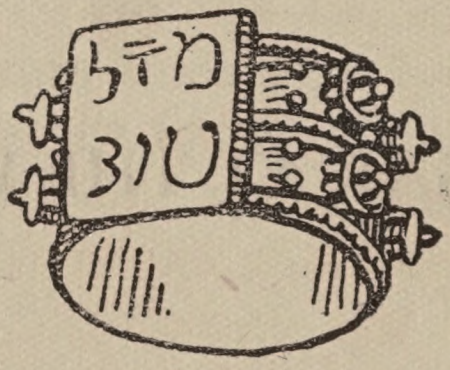
With a smile on his face, King Pedro turned to Nicholas and said to him,—

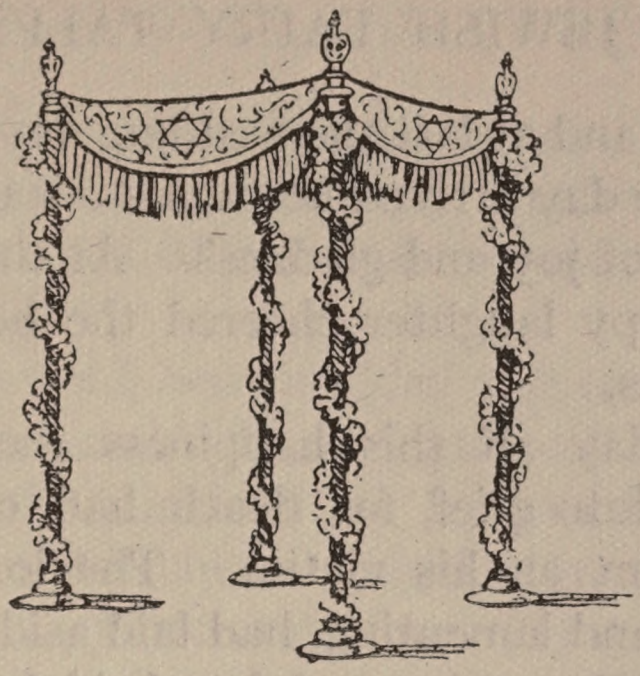
"Do you not see how wisely this learned Jew has answered my question? He deserves to be rewarded not only for his wisdom but also for his toleration, for he implies that our religion and his own have both been given to humanity by our Heavenly Father, who, in His own good time, will decide which is the best religion. Meanwhile, let all men, be their faith what it may, learn to be brothers and friends, trusting that the time may come when love and charity will lead every one to the truth."

SHEBET JEHUDAH, pages 53, 54 (ed. Wiener).



THE BEGGAR AT THE WEDDING





The Beggar at the Wedding

ONCE upon a time, long ago, there was a man whose fame had spread far and wide in the land where he lived. He was exceedingly good-hearted, and as he had plenty of money he was able to help the poor. David—for that was the man's name—had a gentle and good wife. They had an only girl, named Hannah.

In time Hannah grew up into a most lovely woman, whose hand and fortune were sought after by many suitors. One lover in particular had succeeded in gaining her favour by giving a few pence to a poor man whenever Hannah drew his attention to the one in distress. This charity, however, was not genuine, for if alone the lover would refuse to listen to the poor. Hannah consented to accept this suitor as her

husband, and at last the wedding day was fixed. When the day arrived her home resounded with the song of joy and gladness. At the marriage feast happy laughter cheered the hearts of all the guests.

Next day all this happiness was suddenly changed into grief, for death had claimed the bridegroom as his victim. The lonely bride, weeping and lamenting, had laid aside her beautiful wedding robe and her bridal adornment and had put on the black dress of a mourner. All that had happened seemed as though it were a dream to the poor girl. Even her parents could hardly realize the terrible misfortune which had so suddenly befallen them. Yesterday saw the wedding and to-day was to see the funeral of the luckless husband.

In time their sorrow gradually became less intense and the tears of the widow dried off her beautiful face, for time cures every evil under the sun. Hannah's beauty and wealth soon brought new lovers, and she accepted as a husband a man who was harsh and domineering by nature. He wooed Hannah for the sake of her fortune.

Again the bridal eve was followed by a night of death. Grief and tears again succeeded the joy and bliss of the marriage day. For a third time this cruel fate overtook the unfortunate

bridegroom, who, like his predecessors, had only married for the sake of money. In the presence of all the friends of her dear parents Hannah cried,—

"Thrice have I been wedded and thrice have I lost my husband. Never again will I marry, for I will not again lead my beloved to death. God's hand is stretched out against me for some unknown sin. Thrice was I married in order to increase the joy of my dear parents, but this joy has been changed three times into heartbreaking sorrow for all of us. Henceforth I will remain a widow. Daily will I weep and pray to God to forgive me the sin which has cost so dearly."

The friends held their peace and left the sorrowing girl and her parents to comfort one another as best they could.

David had a brother named Samuel, who lived in a far-off country. For very many years they had not heard from one another. In their youth they had parted, each bent on seeking his fortune. As we have seen, David had become very wealthy. Samuel, however, although blessed with a worthy wife and ten children, had remained a poor man. He and his eldest son collected wood in the forest near their hut. Sometimes they were lucky and sold all the wood which they had gathered. One day they failed to find any customers, and when they

returned home at night they were penniless. The result was that next day the entire family were without food.

Again that day Samuel and his eldest son, whose name was Joseph, went to the market-place to sell the wood, but without any success. They resolved to spend the night in the forest rather than see the misery of the starving children in their unhappy home.

Samuel and Joseph prayed to God for help. After a while Joseph turned to his father and suggested that the best thing to do would be to go to his rich uncle David and to ask his assistance. Samuel gladly consented to this proposal.

Early next morning they returned home and told their dear ones about the plan which they had adopted. Joseph took leave of his beloved parents, sisters and brothers and set out on his journey fortified by the prayers and blessings of all the family.

When he came to his uncle's house he was received with a hearty welcome. His aunt and uncle inquired after the welfare of Joseph's parents, and when they heard of the terrible poverty in Joseph's home they immediately sent their trusty steward to help the family with food, money and clothing. Joseph wished to return home in company with the steward, but he was persuaded by his aunt to stay with his

uncle for a short visit. His genial presence soon brought comfort and happiness to his sad cousin Hannah. Often did they sit together in the beautiful garden attached to David's house and read the stirring stories of the Bible.

A few weeks of unclouded happiness soon passed by, and Joseph thought that the time had come when he ought to return home. He went to his uncle one morning and said to him,—

"Let me ask you, dear uncle, to do me a favour, which you can readily promise to do. You have given me so much already. I shall never forget all your love and kindness. One thing only is still wanting to complete my heart's desire. Well do I know how generously you have assisted my beloved father and mother. You have fed and clothed my poor sisters and brothers. You have kept me here for many a happy day as your guest. If you do not promise to do this one favour which I am about to ask, I must at once leave you and return to my own home, for I fear I have already stayed here too long."

"How can I refuse you your request, dear Joseph," cried David. "I faithfully promise on my word of honour to do what you ask, for I know that you are a good and noble lad with an honest and kind heart. I am sure you would never ask for aught which is neither right nor just."

"That is so," said Joseph. "Now, dear uncle, since you have given me your promise, listen to my request. I know you do not really wish me to return home. I will agree to stay with you on one condition and make your home mine also."

"What is the condition?" cried David impatiently.

"The condition," continued Joseph, "is that you give me your consent to marry my dear cousin Hannah. When we are married, we will live with you and comfort you and dear aunt for the rest of your lives."

David's face became white and with tears in his eyes he shook his head.

"What you are asking," he cried, "is impossible. Do you not know, dear Joseph, that Hannah has already been married three times and each time her husband died in the night following the wedding. You are really asking me for leave to die, and I dare not consent. Please do not try to persuade me to agree to your proposal. If you do, it will be to your own hurt."

"But you have given me your word of honour to grant my request," said Joseph, "and your word is your bond. Well do I know the sad story of dear Hannah's weddings. I am fully aware that the three husbands who in turn married my dear cousin died in the first night

of their marriage. The fault was not Hannah's. She is so good and loving, so true and innocent. I trust in God with all my heart and soul, and I will gladly risk my life and happiness in marrying her. The love of God will shield me from all harm. Have no fear, give your consent and we shall all be happy."

David with tremulous voice addressed his nephew, saying,—

" Joseph, I love you as though you were my son. Listen well to what I am about to say. If by marrying my daughter you think you will obtain her fortune, tell me if this be the case; be candid and I will satisfy you and redeem my pledge by giving you her dowry. Nay, I will double the amount if you agree not to wed my child. If this should not satisfy you, name the sum of money you desire, and if I possess it, it shall be yours. I will gladly give it with a good will, only do not risk your precious life by running into danger. You have been a source of real comfort and happiness to us all ever since you set foot in our house. Do not, I beseech you, plunge us all into unutterable misery by risking your life. To marry Hannah is to die."

" Dear uncle ! " Joseph cried, " do you really think for one moment that I wish to marry Hannah for the sake of money. Do not even

think that I would take a penny piece if I am not allowed to marry her. I do not think of money or worldly things now, for I know that love is the best of all treasures. In Hannah have I found my ideal; she alone of all women on earth will be mine, even as I alone of all men will be hers, now and always. Providence is not against us, for I feel that we are destined to make one another happy. Moreover, in our happiness you and dear aunt will find your true peace and joy."

Seeing the folly of prolonging the discussion, David consented to carry out his promise, and said that he would at once tell the news to Hannah and her mother. No sooner had he disclosed the proposal to his daughter than she began to weep and to pray to God for His support and counsel. Joyfully would she have suffered death sooner than see any harm befall Joseph, whom she loved with all her heart. She knew how noble was his character, and she realized that nothing would induce him to change his mind. She felt that she was helpless and that there was nothing to be done except to put her life and that of her beloved Joseph in the hands of God.

Later in the day Joseph came to her and placed the engagement ring on her finger, meanwhile saying,—

"With this ring art thou betrothed unto me according to the Law of Moses and of Israel."

They sealed their engagement by a sweet kiss, exchanging promises of love and constancy. In spite of her happiness, tears welled up in her eyes, for she knew that their great joy and love were in the balance. Joseph tried to console her by telling her that all would be well.

The news of their engagement soon spread in the town where they lived, and the friends of Hannah's parents came to wish the couple joy and good luck; thinking that their congratulations would gladden the hearts of Hannah and of her parents. Joseph's usual good humour was intensified by the happy event. He sought out the poor, to whom he gave gifts of money, well remembering the poverty in which he had lived till he came to his uncle.

A few weeks later the ceremony of marriage was fixed to be celebrated. Once again Hannah put on her bridal attire, thinking the while of the terrible misfortunes she had experienced. At last the hour came when she stood with Joseph at her side beneath the wedding canopy.

Just as the marriage service was about to begin, an old man, unknown to all the assembled guests, approached Joseph and asked him to give him a moment's attention, because he had to tell him something of vital importance.

Joseph immediately turned aside with the stranger and asked him if he required any help. The stranger replied,—

"I come to help you, for I know that you have a good and kind heart. I ask you to remember that wealth will not avail in the hour of your need, charity alone will save you and deliver you from death. Be hospitable this day and invite to your wedding feast the poor who will bless you for your kindness. This is all I have to say, and now let me go, for I wish you well."

The stranger was Elijah the prophet, the friend and comforter of all in trouble and distress.

The marriage service began, and at its conclusion the guests took their places at the banquet. At the head of the table sat the bridegroom, and at his side was his beautiful bride. The guests began to eat and to drink, when all of a sudden there was seen at the door of the room a beggar in rags and tatters, his skin yellow and unwashed, his hair unkempt and his stature bent. His eyes were flaming like fire, and at his presence profound silence obtained. Not a sound was heard within the room; all was hushed in strange suspense, till Joseph in a loud and fearless voice cried,—

"Come hither, good friend; you are most welcome at this, my marriage feast. At my side shall you sit, for here all are most heartily welcome, rich and poor alike."

Joseph told the servants to go to the door of the house and to invite all the poor who passed by to join his guests.

The beggar went to the seat next to Joseph's and sat down. Joseph waited on his unknown guest and gave him of the best. When the banquet was over the bride arose and retired to her apartment. Joseph arose likewise and was about to follow her when the beggar placed his hand on Joseph's shoulder and said in a whisper—

"I must have just one word with you in private, please. I cannot stay here much longer, but I have to tell you why I am with you to-day."

Joseph led him to an empty room and requested him to be seated. After a moment or two had elapsed the stranger began to speak as follows:—

"My friend, I am truly sorry for your own and also for your dear wife's sake, but I have come here on a very sad errand. I am sent to you against my will. It is God who has sent me here to take you to Him. Prepare now to leave the world and all its joys."

Joseph looked at his guest without fear, and in a very calm voice he said,—

"If this be God's will, so be it done in love and obedience. Nevertheless, I do beseech you grant me a respite—just one year in happiness

with my wife, and then I promise to go with you."

"No, my good friend, it cannot be," cried the angel of death, who was in the beggar's guise. "Not even a month," said the angel, "not even the seven days of rejoicing appointed to be kept by bride and bridegroom, not even one day's delay, but this very day must you die even as the former three husbands of your beloved wife."

Joseph made haste to reply,—

"God's word is true, and He is true. If you cannot accede to my petition to grant me a respite, give me leave to go to my wife and to bid her farewell."

"This will I gladly allow," exclaimed the angel, "in return for your kindness to me this day; you knew me not—yet have you treated me as a friend."

The angel spoke so gently because his heart was full of sorrow. He knew that Joseph was a good and true man, and it grieved him to lead him through the valley of the shadow of death.

Joseph hastened to his wife's apartment and entered. He found her rapt in prayer with tears in her eyes.

"Quick, my beloved," he whispered, "my time is very short, I cannot stay here, I must hasten far away with the strange beggar. He has come to fetch me. Let me bless you for

your unfailing sweetness and love; come, let me kiss you for the last time."

"If," she cried, "you hasten away I will go with you, for now we are one and nothing shall ever part us, not even cruel death itself."

With a passionate grip she took his hand and told him to lead her to the beggar. When she saw him, she said,—

"Stranger! you are still our guest beneath our roof. If you would repay our hospitality this day just grant me one little favour. Take me with my husband to the Eternal Judge and I will ask Him whether His holy word in the Law is true. Is it not written therein: 'And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her, let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her'" (Deut. xx. 7)?

"Nay," cried the angel, "I will go for you and I will bring you answer again."

His sorrow for the unfortunate bride and bridegroom prompted him to do this service of love. The angel added,—

"I will join in the choir of angels who praise God morning and evening, and I will put your question before the Father of Mercy who dwells with the meek and the broken-hearted. I hope for the sake of both of you that Joseph's life will be spared."

In a moment the angel was gone and in

another moment he returned. His face was shining with heavenly light and his voice was sweet and soft.

"Listen," he said. "Good friends! I rejoice to tell you that your prayers have been heard. Live well and long together, enjoy your life. The other husbands died because they married, not for love, but for greed of gold. They were hard-hearted, scorning the poor and the weak. You shall live to help others to live and to prosper. Farewell!" and in a second the angel was seen no more.

The bride and bridegroom spent that night in giving praise to God for His love and mercy. The parents, however, were weeping throughout the long night, whilst their friends had prepared the grave for Joseph's body. At dawn, Joseph went to his uncle and aunt to greet them. They were greatly overcome with joy and comforted one another by praying together to the Almighty. All then hastened to fill in the unused grave. In this plot they planted seeds of daffodils, so that in time to come they might look upon the beautiful flowers as an emblem of the Divine Mercy.

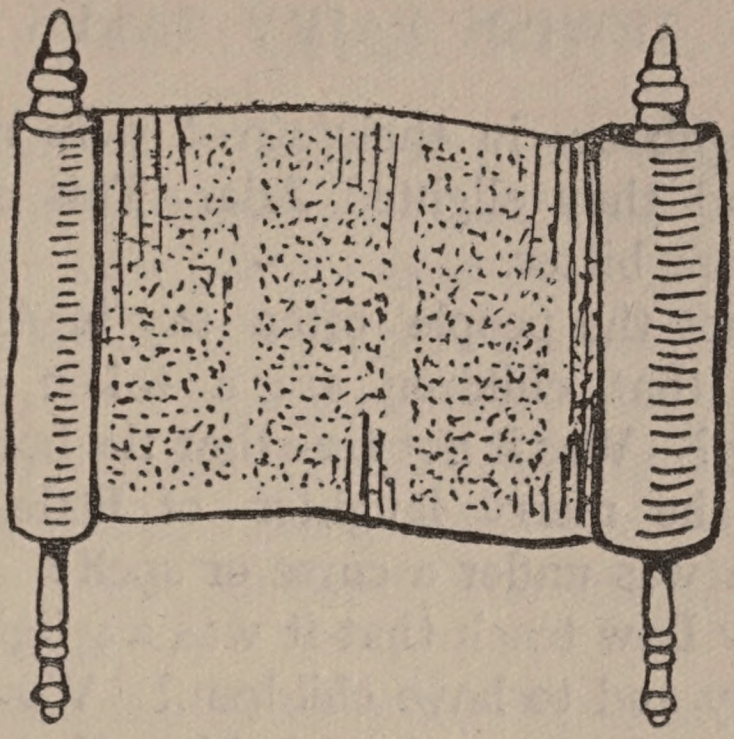
Joseph continued to be charitable and kind to all who needed his help. Whenever the people saw him they were wont to exclaim: "Truly charity delivers from death."

MIDRASH TANCHUMA, *Ha'azinu*, § viii.

THE CLEVER WIFE



ABRAHAM BEING CARRIED TO HIS NEW QUARTERS.



The Clever Wife

LONG, long ago, there lived in the old town of Sidon a happy couple named Abraham and Ada. Although they loved one another very much, still there was something wanting to complete their happiness. They had been married for nearly ten years, but they had not been blessed with a child. Ofttimes Ada would sit in her room and weep. She prayed every day to God to fulfil her desire by giving her a son or a daughter. Abraham did his best to comfort her by telling her that all would come right in time. Nevertheless, he felt very sad when he came home and thought of the future. He would have given anything to have had a little son who might be taught the holy religion which he loved so well.

The neighbours in their street were none too kind and they slighted Ada. This made her grief more bitter.

Did not the people often say in Abraham's hearing that children are a token of God's blessing? Was it not true that the house which lacked the merry laughter of little innocent children was under a curse or spell? Did not the holy Law teach that it was a religious duty to marry and to have children? Would it not be better, he argued with himself, to divorce his wife, if, after being married for ten years, she had no child? She might marry another man and have children and so find her happiness. All these thoughts flashed again and again through his mind.

At last when the anniversary of their tenth marriage day arrived, Abraham said to his wife,—

"Let us visit to-day our true friend Rabbi Simeon, the son of Jochai."

When they came before the famous master, Abraham, with tears in his eyes, said,—

"O good Rabbi! My dear wife has been faithful to me and loving during the past ten years. It has pleased our Heavenly Father to withhold from us the blessing of children. I fear this is on account of my many sins. It seems to me that our home henceforth will not

be as happy as it should be; my wife grieves over her barrenness and I fret because she is unhappy. Is it not my duty to set her free?"

Whilst Abraham was speaking, his wife wept. She knew that if he sent her away from his heart and home, her life would be utterly miserable and unendurable. Her genuine sorrow touched the heart of her husband, who turned to her and exclaimed,—

"My dear and sweet wife! be calm and do not grieve, for we must ever submit to the will of Providence. Do not think that I am not ofttimes sad, because we have no child to cheer your long days. If I could only give you some substitute, I would most gladly do so. Listen, dearest! I now faithfully promise to allow you to choose whatever you like best in our home and you may take it with you to your father's house as a keepsake when you leave me for good. This will always be a visible token of the deep affection and true love which united us during the past ten years."

The Rabbi watched his guests with sympathetic eyes. He knew that Abraham had made up his mind to divorce his worthy wife. Nothing would make him waver. With a merry twinkle in his far-seeing eye, he began to address them, saying,—

"My dear children! I can only pity you, for

I am deeply grieved to see how you are about to lose one another. Before you finally part, however, let me advise you to invite this day your good friends to a farewell banquet, even as they gathered around you ten years ago at your marriage feast. Love united you and in love prepare to separate, if it must be."

The wise master was in hopes that all the old ties would be revived by the presence of the family circle of friends and that love would still hold them together. Abraham and Ada promised to follow the advice of the Rabbi and they returned home.

Ada at once sent to all their friends and provided a most liberal banquet. Her husband sat beside her as usual, and she took care that his wine-glass was constantly refilled. Good cheer made the company very happy, and Abraham determined to spend a jolly evening for the last time in the company of his wife, whom he really loved.

Ada had carefully prepared her plans. Her husband had toasted each of his guests, and soon the excellent wine which he drank sent him into a deep sleep. Without a moment's delay, Ada beckoned to her servants to come to her. She told them to lift up the armchair in which her husband sat asleep and to carry it at once to her father's house in a neighbouring street.

The company looked on in surprise, and guessing the meaning of what they saw, they took their departure.

Meanwhile Abraham, fast asleep, had been carried to his new quarters. He was put in a beautiful room, with Ada at his side waiting for him to awaken. At dawn the effect of the wine began to wear off and he awoke. Looking around with great surprise, he exclaimed,—

"Where am I?"

Ada took his hand and stroking it gently, she said to him,—

"My beloved! you are in my father's house."

"What am I doing here?" he cries.

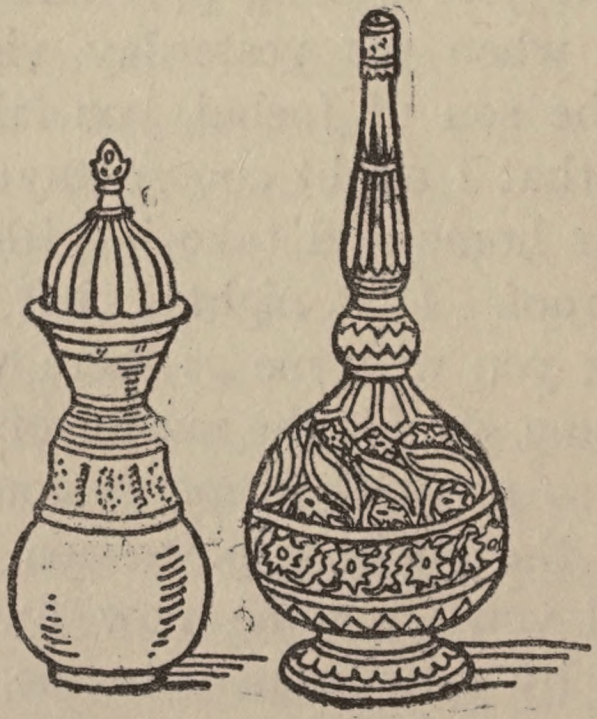
"You are just waking up," she says; "you remember when we yesterday visited Rabbi Simeon, the son of Jochai, you faithfully promised me that I might choose anything I liked best in our home and take it with me when I left your roof. Last night I left your house and I took you with me as there was nothing in your home, or, for the matter of that, in all the world so precious to me as your dear self. You were the choicest possession in our old home, and you are mine now and for ever. You have, by your promise to me, given yourself over to me. Divorce or no divorce, you are my property, for I know very well you always keep your promise."

Abraham saw the humour of the situation in which he found himself, and laughed again and again at the huge joke his clever wife had perpetrated at his expense.

"Well done," he exclaimed, "we are now agreed that the question of divorce is solved. Once again are we united and this time for ever. Nothing shall part us as long as we live."

Like all good people they lived a very happy life. In time a son was born and later on a daughter was given to them, and they all rejoiced in one another's happiness.

YALḲUṬ, *Genesis* § 16.



THE COINS OF ELIJAH



ELIJAH BESTOWS HIS GIFT.



The Coins of Elijah

ONCE upon a time there was a really pious man who was ever ready to assist all who needed his help. Prosperity and happiness smiled upon him. Year in and year out all went well with him and his dear ones. All of a sudden a change took place. The business which he carried on proved to be gradually showing a loss instead of the former profit. Trade began to dwindle, the regular customers died or moved away. Bad debts increased and eventually the entire fortune of the good man was lost. In order to provide for the daily needs of his wife and children he worked in the fields as a labourer paid by the day. The day's work was long and hard, but a good heart and a willing spirit enabled him to overcome all difficulties. He even spared a coin of his wages to help those in a worse plight than he found himself.

Now it happened one day whilst he was

engaged in ploughing a field that a stranger approached and greeted him, saying,—

"Peace be to thee and to all thy house."

He replied,—

"Peace be also to thee and thine."

The stranger then continued,—

"Friend, I come to tell thee that thou art destined to regain thy fortune and to live in affluence for a period of six years during thy life here on earth. It is thine to choose when this period shall begin; shall it be now or later in life?"

Astonished at the strange words which he had heard, the labourer looked at his companion to see if he was dreaming.

"Good stranger," he cried, "art thou a prophet or a magician that thou speakest in this wise? I fear thou art a poor man even as I am. Go thy way in peace, for I cannot help thee to-day, for I am penniless at the moment. I should be happy to give thee a fee for thy happy forecast, but I cannot give what I have not got. Go in peace and may Heaven send thee help."

The stranger went away and the labourer resumed his work without thinking any more of the strange conversation which he had just had. After a short interval the stranger returned and repeated the offer, only to be

refused. When, however, for the third time he urged the unwilling labourer to accept his gift by believing in the proffered promise, the poor toiler, weary of his hard daily struggle in the fields, at last consented to consult his wife before coming to a decision. A glimmer of hope in the possibility of the promise had arisen in his heart.

"Perhaps, after all," he thought, "kind Providence has sent this messenger to help me in my dire distress and that now the poverty which has harassed me and my dear ones will be replaced by wealth and prosperity."

He ran home as quickly as his legs would carry him and told his wife all that had transpired. He emphasized the insistence displayed by the stranger. He said to his wife,—

"Assuming that the stranger is speaking the truth and that I am to be rich for a period of six years, when do you advise me to choose our time of prosperity—now or later in life?"

After a moment's consideration she cried,—

"Now, now."

Her husband returned to the field without further delay and found the stranger awaiting his decision. When the labourer told him his wish to enjoy there and then the promised wealth and prosperity, the stranger opened his purse and took out two pieces of silver.

"Here, my friend," he said, "take these two coins and return them to me six years hence when I shall call on thee. Do not forget I shall require my money to be restored to me when I come to demand it."

After the labourer had taken the coins he thanked his benefactor and promised to return the gift as arranged. In a second the stranger had disappeared; no trace of the direction he had taken was discerned by the labourer, who also recalled the fact that the stranger had come upon him all of a sudden.

"Very strange," he said; "there is some mystery about this stranger, he seems to come from nowhere and to return to the same place."

No sooner had the labourer placed the silver coins in his pocket than he perceived a sudden change coming over him. He no longer felt the same man. His poverty and sorrow fled away from him and a new feeling of contentment and security arose in his heart. He bowed his head in gratitude and thanked God for His manifold mercies.

Meanwhile, wonderful events were occurring in his home. His eldest son was turning the soil in the garden at the back of their house, when he saw gold glittering in the sunlight. He dug deeper and deeper and continued to find the precious metal; in fact there was

evidently a treasure which had been lying hidden there all the years of their poverty. The young man cried aloud in his joy. His mother and her other sons came to see what was amiss. As soon as she saw what was happening she sent her youngest son to his father. She said,—

"Do not fail to tell him that God has given us back our fortune."

Before the door of their house, however, stood the father. In a moment he was with his wife and children, and uniting with them gave thanks to Him who giveth and taketh away.

The pious man and his virtuous wife resolved to make good use of their wealth as long as it was entrusted to their care. They were very happy because they were now in a position to help the poor who so sorely needed their assistance. The wife said to her good husband,—

"My dear, we must not forget that our prosperity will not last for ever. We are to be rich for six years only. Let us during this period feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and assist the needy. We shall always have the satisfaction of knowing that we made other people happy during the years of our good fortune. We shall be happy in realizing that we have made good use of our trust."

"Verily," he said, "the law of kindness is on thy tongue."

Not a day passed without an occasion offering itself to these good people to bestow their wealth upon those less fortunate than themselves. They did not fail in seizing every opportunity of doing an act of charity and kindness. The youngest son was told by his mother to keep an account of their own expenses and also an account of the money given in alms.

The six years passed like a dream. One day the expected benefactor came to their house, and after receiving a warm welcome turned to his host and said,—

"The six years have passed and I have come to ask thee to return my money."

The pious man exclaimed,—

"Dear friend! Thy demand is quite fair and just. Yet, stay! I accepted thy gift only after I had consulted my wife, and now before I repay my debt, I must again ask her advice."

Whereupon he turned to his wife who was present and said to her,—

"Beloved wife! please advise me how am I to repay our debt to our generous benefactor here?"

"Let me," she cried, "settle accounts with

him." Turning to him she said, "I will show thee how we have spent the fortune entrusted to our care through thy kindness. Behold the account books."

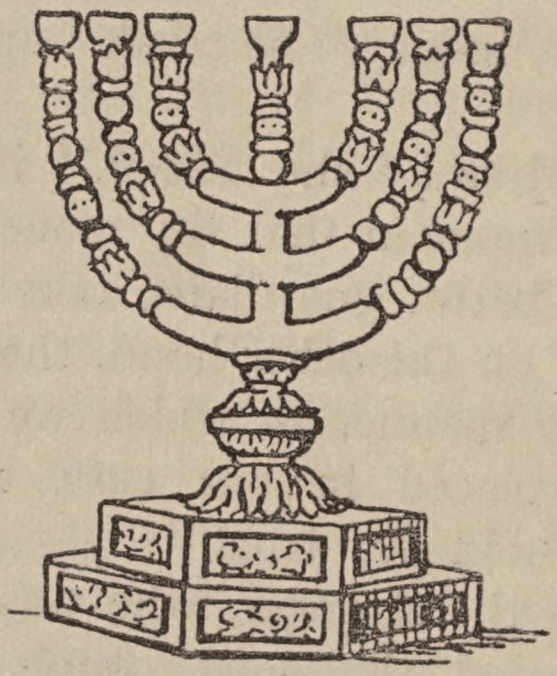
The kind stranger looked with deep interest at the long lists recording the money spent in charity.

"You have, indeed," he cried, "spent plenty of money."

"But, good sir!" she added, "if thou dost believe for a moment that thy money might be entrusted to better guardians, take away then thy gift. If, on the other hand, thou art satisfied with the manner in which we have used the wealth placed in our care, then let us continue to hold our trust."

Thereupon the stranger, who was Elijah the prophet, blessed the good couple and bade them enjoy the wealth they knew so well how to use. In a moment the prophet had departed and the happy couple kept his coins and bequeathed them to their eldest son as a family heirloom.

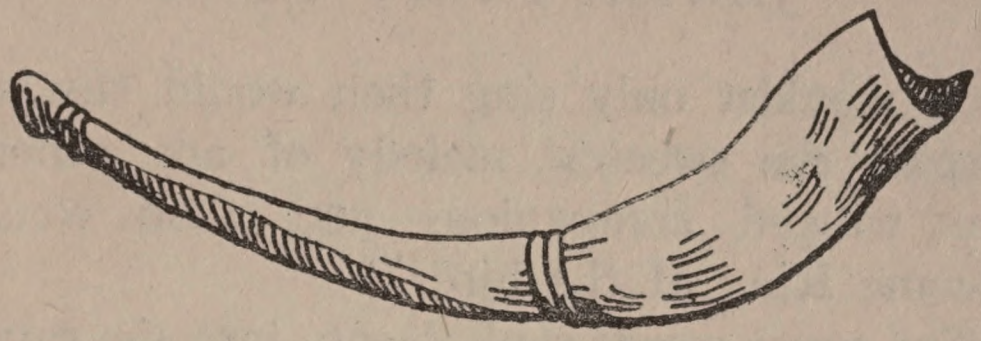
YALḲUṬ, *Ruth* §§ 607, 601.



THE FOX AND THE RAVEN



"GOOD DAY, DEAR FRIEND RAVEN."



The Fox and the Raven

ONE fine day a raven found a nice piece of fresh cheese, which he carried away to a favourite resting place on the leafy branch of a beautiful fig-tree. Believing himself to be out of harm's way, he was about to eat and enjoy his booty, when he heard a well-known voice softly calling to him,—

"Good day, dear friend Raven."

Whence did the voice come? Lo and behold, at the foot of the fig-tree stood Master Fox, eyeing with a greedy look the raven and the cheese. How to obtain the latter was the thought uppermost in the mind of the crafty fox.

Being unable to climb the tree, he resolved to trick the raven so as to make him drop the cheese. Again Master Fox cried,—

"Good day, dear friend Raven, thou art verily the most beautiful of birds. If all the winged creatures beneath the heavens were gathered around thee, thou wouldst easily excel them all by reason of thy lovely feathers. Moreover, if

thou wouldst only sing then would thy song surpass the sweetest melody of any other of thy winged companions and thou wouldst become King of the birds."

The sweet words sank deeply into the raven's heart and he rejoiced at the prospect of attaining to such undreamt-of greatness. All that he had to do was merely to sing.

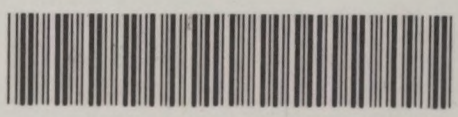
Excited with joy and pride he quickly opened his mouth and raising his voice, he tried to sing. Alas! he only croaked; meanwhile the cheese fell from his mouth to the ground. The greedy fox pounced upon the prey and with a joyful cry he said,—

"Dear friend Raven, never again will I listen to the voice of other sweet singers after hearing thy beautiful voice. Pray excuse me, if I hasten away to finish the cheese thou hast so generously given me as a reward for my flattery. Great indeed must be the power of pride since it overcomes the desires of thy appetite."

(*The XIIIth Fable in* R. BERACHYAH'S *Fox Fables.*)

Printed for ROBERT SCOTT, *Publisher*, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *by* BUTLER & TANNER, FROME.

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